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BOSTON'S EXPERIENCE WITH MUNICIPAL BATHS.

WHEN the Boston city fathers, way back in the sixties, voted \$10,000 for the establishment of "suitable places in South and East Boston and the city proper for salt-water bathing during the summer months," they builded wiser than they knew. Little dreamed they then that before the century closed nearly two millions of the residents from the congested quarters annually, and incidentally the entire population, would be benefited by the wise and thoughtful provision thus inaugurated. The half a dozen baths started by the city, so long ago, have become the nucleus of an extensive plant and have developed various forms through the years.

Upon the walls of the city's bath department headquarters there hangs a large map of Boston. The outlines of the deeply indented coast are oddly marked at intervals by signs which attract the visitor's attention. These markings indicate the location of the baths and the scheme of their distribution. That care has been taken to equalize the service is shown by the fact that seventeen baths are located south of Boston Common, taken as the center of the Hub, and sixteen are north. The oblongs which cluster at the various points on the river, inner harbor, and bay denote the floating baths, of which there are now fourteen. Scattered all along the extensive coast line of Boston harbor are the crescents, showing the ten beach baths. The Greek and Roman crosses and the circles in the interior mark the locations of the two swimming pools, the several open-air gymnasia, and combined baths and gymnasia. A large star points the place of the new permanent bath on Dover street.

A study of the map demonstrates the fact that no district of Boston is without some form of public bathing facility. Some of the places, by reason of their location or the conveniences they afford, have a patronage from regions far beyond their immediate neighborhoods. The L street bath in South Boston, for example, situated on a beautiful natural beach and accessible

by electric cars from all sections of the city and suburbs, draws throngs from every part of Greater Boston.

Boston's experience in the line of municipal free baths has undoubtedly developed much that is of practical value to other cities looking to an actual crystallization of popular sentiment in the direction of public provision for communal needs.

It is during the past two years, under Mayor Quincy's incumbency, that Boston's public bathing plant has had its most notable expansion. In 1897 there were but fourteen baths of all kinds, as against thirty-three in operation last summer. The number of bathers in the same time increased in still greater proportion, from 657,275 in 1897 to 1,920,368 in 1898—a showing which amply justifies the extension of the plant.

A new feature in the management of the municipal baths in Boston has been their removal from the care of the board of health, whose hands were already full. In 1898 the work was given over to a municipal department constituted by the mayor for the special conduct and management of the baths. This department is composed of an unpaid committee of five men and two women, citizens of Boston, selected by the mayor, and their terms range from one to five years. Thomas J. Lane is chairman of this unique commission, the other members being Mr. Leonard Ahl, Mrs. Lawrence Logan, Mr. Robert Woods, of the South End House College settlement; Dr. John Duff, Mrs. J. H. Hecht, and Mr. Patrick Tracy. The general secretary of the board is employed as superintendent. The question as to whether it was an essential part of public policy to establish and maintain baths at public expense has never been raised in Boston. It was a self-evident fact, attested by everyday experience and the laws of sanitary science, that baths are the best possible offset to disease, promoting the health of the community as a whole and incidentally aiding in moral betterment. The inadequacy of bathing facilities afforded to working classes in the city tenements was a well-known condition, which has scarcely needed the frequent attestation of labor statisticians and charity workers. From the beginning the Boston bathing places have received the most significant degree of approbation in the extensive

patronage of the people. More than 300,000 visitors in four months patronized the first six baths during that initial season nearly two score years ago.

While cleanliness has been the primary object sought, in the later development of the work the provision for recreation has entered with increasing vigor into the plans. There is, as a matter of course, more or less enjoyment attendant upon the mere act of bathing. As is well known, swimming as a sport has few rivals. And probably no form of physical exercise combines so many estimable features as swimming in its cleanliness value, in physical power gained, and in the ability to save life. It was a good idea, it must be granted, in order to bring this desirable accomplishment within the reach of all, and especially of public-school children, to provide instruction in swimming at all the baths for the whole or part of the summer season. In anticipation of his summer's work the city's head instructor is detailed to visit all the schools before their close and give lessons in the swimming movements. To sustain interest a series of swimming contests are held at the close of the season, and medals are awarded for highest proficiency. Instruction in physical exercises is also given free to classes of school children at the various gymnasias several days in each week.

That Bostonians are distinguished for courtesy comes, no doubt, from the constant exercise of that fine quality of heart and mind. The aim of the civic authorities is to be thoughtful in the minor details which imply consideration for the personal comfort and welfare of the people. There are seats upon which the bathers can rest, or spectators can enjoy the enlivening scenes upon the beaches. Ice-water is supplied for those who thirst. Each bathing place is provided with the necessary remedies and appliances for cases of sudden illness or accident. Watchful patrolmen and trained attendants are on duty ready to warn venturesome bathers or hasten to the rescue of any who venture beyond their depth. At some of the larger beaches a system of checking is supplied for bicycles, and large awning shelters furnish grateful protection from the sun. To these and other protective measures for comfort and safety is due the

almost complete exemption from loss of life at the Boston baths. Courtesy to all comers is required from all attendants, who are instructed to "regard as your guest everyone who comes, and treat him as such." Medical directors are in attendance at certain hours at the gymnasia to make bodily examinations and prescribe courses of training. A woman medical director is employed for the women.

Experience in Boston has corroborated the results of the earlier experience of British and continental cities that there should be many smaller, inexpensive baths rather than a few large ones, so as to be placed at the doors of the poor and thus serve the people for whom they are intended. It has been found that, if the bath is within half a mile to a mile of the home, it will be readily and extensively used; if it is two or three miles away, its use will be very greatly restricted. This basic proposition has been recognized by Boston from the beginning. The initial baths were located each in a separate section of the city. The site for a bath should always be selected with special reference to its accessibility to the neighborhood for whose use it is intended. Boston goes a step farther in catering to the needs of the community by selecting its attendants for the baths from among the residents in a neighborhood, and who are thus calculated to make the patrons feel at home. Those who have been a long time in the service know by name hundreds of the bathers, and in not a few cases are in friendly personal relation with them.

Negroes, for example, are the chosen attendants for the great clientele of Africans who come from the vicinity of Cambridge street and lower Joy street to bathe at West Boston bridge. Where the Jews are in the majority, as at Craigie bridge, men of that nationality are chosen to serve. Italians furnish the workers at Warren bridge, Irish at Dover street, and a cosmopolitan group of attendants form the staff at the great North End beach, where no less than fifteen languages may be heard among the 7,000 bathers who resort there daily.

Another point which must characterize American baths in contrast to those of foreign cities is that they must be free to all the people. The municipal system in British and continental

cities lacks the democratic character. Social distinctions are usually preserved, too, in the provision of first-, second-, and sometimes third-class baths. Admission to Boston baths is absolutely free. If the Boston bather does not possess a suit, he can secure the use of one at any bath for 5 cents. If a towel is lacking, it can be secured, with a piece of soap, for 1 cent. Children's suits are supplied at all the baths free of charge.

The city has found it a better policy during the past two years to own its provision of bathing suits and towels. By the earlier arrangement superintendents supplied the stock at each bath and retained the fees in addition to their regular salaries. Last season the income to the city from this source was \$3,500, about one-tenth of the total cost of administering the baths. It has been suggested that each bath should maintain its own laundry. At the North End bath this is quite possible, but at the smaller baths such an arrangement would be too costly and consequently impracticable. The city owns at present 1,200 girls' one-part suits, 1,200 women's suits in two parts, 1,800 men's two-part suits, 1,200 men's trunks and 3,600 boys' trunks for the floating baths, and 15,000 towels.

Among the suggestive improvements introduced in Boston's public baths is the new style of floating bath, a model of which is seen at the New Harvard bridge. It is the original device of one of the bath commissioners. The tank of this house is left open to the sky, thus insuring perfect ventilation and keeping the interior dry. Runways on either side—one for adults, the other for children—are fitted with lockers and take the place of the old-style dressing closets.

Another form of bath which should have wide adoption is the river bath. A specially simple and suggestive device for this use is the one for children at Spring Street Station, Charles river. This bath floats on casks and is filled to a depth of two feet with water. A neat picket fence incloses it, with ropes at the side by which the little ones may support themselves while learning to swim. As showing the simplicity and cheapness with which a serviceable bath may be fitted up, that of Neponset

bridge may be taken as a type. An unused boathouse was rented; at a cost of \$50 a simple platform and approach were constructed, an attendant was installed, and the work was done.

There is suggestion in the arrangement of the swimming pools which were established to supply summer baths to the sections of the city without water frontage. One of the pools is located at Orchard Park, a small open space with grass and trees, contiguous to the tenement district of Roxbury. The tank, of concrete, is inclosed by a high board fence. Fresh water is supplied by the city pipes. Great care is exercised to keep the water clean, the surface being drained off several times daily, and once each day the tank is washed out. Several polling booths have been fitted up as dressing-rooms.

The concrete pool inside of Ward 18 wardroom on Cabot street accommodates from 1,000 to 1,400 people daily. A unique feature of this pool is that it is floored over during election time. This use of the wardroom shows the ingenuity and common-sense of the bath management in utilizing the conveniences at hand without waiting for greater things. Other wardrooms are in process of equipment for use by the people, notably that at Roxbury Crossing at the heart of a congested district, which is fitted up with gymnasium apparatus, all portable and interchangeable, that it may be removed when the room is required for other purposes.

Boston, of course, indorses the spray as the best, simplest, and most economical form of bath. At the Charlestown beach an enterprising Yankee device has been conjured up by means of a piece of hose connecting with the city mains. At the end of the hose is fastened a metal ring punctured with holes. Supported upon a suitable stout wooden frame this simple apparatus serves excellently the purpose of a spray.

It is the generally accepted theory that natural bathing places should first be utilized. The short duration of the open bathing season makes necessary provisions which shall secure opportunities for all the year. The new permanent bath on Dover street, the first of a series for each industrial section of the city, is a fine example of a municipal free-bath institution.

It cost, including land, \$86,000, and in arrangement and elegance of material used is well calculated to realize the mayor's ideal of elevating the taste of the people and dignifying the common act of bathing.

The building is simple and substantially constructed of brick with stone trimmings. The interior is a scheme of marble and mosaic, the partitions, staircases, and walls all being constructed of the durable stone. The best equipment in Gegenström sprays, open plumbing, and nickle-plated trimmings has been installed. The attendance proves that the bath is fulfilling the purpose for which it is designed, nearly 120,000 people having patronized it during the first six months.

Altogether Boston's experience in the establishment and management of municipal baths is highly instructive to cities the country over.

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